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XVI.—THE NATURE OF TRAGEDY

The inadequacy of our current literary terms is nowhere clearer than in the case of tragedy, despite the amount of energy that has been spent on efforts to define it. Beyond or below the incontestable examples—the masterpieces of Æschylus, of Sophocles, of Shakespeare—stretches a wide and uncertainly bounded territory, sometimes thought of as including almost any play of a fairly serious sort, sometimes divided according as its occupants present, or fail to present, certain accepted features. The former point of view leads to regarding as vaguely tragic even plays that end in no positive catastrophe, the latter to compiling lengthy catalogs of pieces that have nothing of the tragic form but the label. At first sight it may seem that there is a radical difference between plays which end in downfall and death and those in which a threatened woe is at length and completely averted; but if we limit the name of tragedy to the former class, we are forced to deny it to pieces that have traditionally laid claim to it, and thus to show how hard is the task of drawing positive

distinctions. If we feel that the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus is really more akin to *Macbeth* than to the bloodless products of a mistakenly classicizing Renaissance, we may yet find it hard to justify that feeling on the basis of the current conceptions, or to account for numerous facts which the actual plays present. Why, for instance, are the best examples of tragedy confined almost entirely to certain well-marked periods—Greek to less than a century between Salamis and the death of Sophocles, Elizabethan either to the seven years between 1586 and the death of Marlowe or to the decade 1599-1609, French to the somewhat longer but far less well filled interval between the *Cid* in 1636 and *Phèdre* in 1677? Why, again, are tragic heroes usually of royal or noble rank? Why is the action usually set in a more or less remote time? Are traits like these essential to the form, or merely adventitious? To answer such questions, we need to examine two matters: the nature of the material best able to yield the tragic effect, the nature of the faculty by which that material is to be contemplated. The present paper—in rather summary fashion, and with no pretence at an exhaustive review of authorities—will attempt this double task.

I

It may seem a commonplace to affirm that a tragic reaction cannot be secured unless the material manifests the presence of positive and malevolent evil, frankly faced and mastered by the dramatist, without misrepresentation or evasion; that no tragedy was ever created by a dramatist who distorted the inevitable march of events to secure a happy ending, or who sought to attenuate the sinister and malignant aspects of human destiny. Yet the point has been an occasion of error ever since Aristotle, by his uncer-

tainty as to the real nature of tragic material, not only confused his own treatment of the problem, but left the confusion as a legacy to ensuing ages more desirous of justifying his authority than of examining the actual facts. Hence an appraisal of the Aristotelian view must precede any effort at progress in a better direction.

Aristotle rightly insists, in his discussion of the plot, that the tragic effect should arise from the very nature and connection of the events with which it deals;¹ but he clouds his analysis of the matter by failing to make clear that these events must be of a certain kind. There is nothing about the famous *recognition* and *reversal* that restricts them to tragedy; they may occur in comedy, as may the error (*ἁμαρτία*) which is indeed a fertile source of dramatic complications, but not necessarily of tragic ones unless the conditions are appropriate. On these conditions Aristotle touches somewhat lightly; the statement that they must be such as to arouse terror or pity does not carry us far, nor is the matter much advanced by the brief remarks² concerning the *πάθος*, "a destructive or painful action, such as deaths on the stage, wounds, and the like." Such events, tho they may have some tragic value in themselves, are much more moving when they occur between persons closely related; so that themes containing them are those especially to be sought by the tragic poet. So far the statements, tho rather sketchy, are sound; but now enters a disturbing factor, the fact that these themes involve an element which may be thought morally repulsive. Accordingly Aristotle (whether consciously or not the method of the *Poetics* does not enable us to say) begins to reverse his

¹ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων.—*Poetics*, XIV, 1.

² XI, 6. It is only fair to say that some scholars think our text of the *Poetics* defective at this point.

position, until he ends by declaring that it is best that the real nature of the deed be discovered before it is actually done, and that by the discovery it be averted. His previous words, however, have distinctly committed him to the position that the unhappy ending is best. It is the preference for it that makes Euripides "most tragic" (XIII, 6); the happy ending suggests comedy, "in which nobody kills anybody" (XIII, 8); and the ridiculous, with which comedy deals, is "painless and not destructive" (v, 1), the exact opposite of the tragic *πράθος*.

Seemingly we have here a hopeless discrepancy; and certain attempts to explain it only set it in a sharper light. Professor Bywater, for instance, says:

Aristotle's view of the construction exemplified in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* is presumably this, that the full effect of tragedy is attained in the most artistic way, without the adjunct of physical suffering, and with the minimum of offence to our moral sensibilities. His ultimate preference for this construction is intelligible enough in itself; and we have been prepared for it to some extent by his recognition throughout this chapter of the legitimacy of a situation like that in the *Iphigenia*, in which the deed of horror, though contemplated, is not actually carried out. The criterion which now determines the relative values of the possible situations in Tragedy is a moral one, their effect not on the emotions, but on the moral sensibility of the audience. . . . In chapter XIII Aristotle was thinking only of the emotional effect of tragedy as produced by the most obvious means; here he comes to see that the same effect may be produced in a finer form without their aid.³

But it is not true that the effect produced by the *Iphigenia* is identical with that produced by plays ending in a catastrophe; it is not a question of a similar effect more or less "finely" produced, but of two effects radically dissimilar. Not only is there something disconcerting in a view that would make the *Iphigenia* "finer" than the

³ *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (Oxford, 1909), pp. 224-5.

Oresteia or the *Ædipus*; there is an absolute confusion between matters which would be kept apart by any observer who was not led astray by the desire to justify Aristotle at whatever cost.

So far as Aristotle himself is concerned, the error would seem to have arisen from his over-intellectual approach to the problem, which led him to substitute ingenious effects of plot for the genuine tragic material, and to underestimate the "sense of sin"—traits, by the way, which explain his fondness for Euripides, and his almost total ignoring of Æschylus. Conscious wrong-doing and deeds of horror are too strong meat for him, as they have been for many since his time. But whatever the views of Aristotle and his commentators may be, we must recognize that a type of drama exists that deals with material in which moral evil is implicit, and ends in the downfall of at least some of its participants; and it is further obvious that the emotions normally thought of as tragic are most readily generated by plays of just this type. Hence we may fairly ask whether these emotions can ever be roused when the elements just named are absent.⁴ Does not their absence produce mere excitement and interest, as in the *Iphigenia* itself, that typical play of romantic adventure? Surely common sense must put such a play, as well as such a character-study as the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, on the other side of the line from the *Ædipus*, the *Hippolytus*, or the *Agamemnon*.

⁴In the Renaissance, Castelvetro (1505-71) noted Aristotle's inconsistency, and held that *πάθος* should have been defined more fully. He also held that "tragedy without the sad ending cannot reasonably excite, and, as experience shows, does not excite, fear or pity." Cf. H. B. Charlton, *Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry* (Manchester, 1913), p. 98. Otherwise, of course, he has his full share of Renaissance delusions.

Without the presence of evil, then, a tragic reaction cannot result. It will not be generated by mere passion, however excessive; by a mere clash of wills, where neither side is palpably in the wrong; nor yet by a simple error of judgment. Each of these may lead to dramatic complications, but not to tragedy unless the act of passion in question be of a sort to rouse the latent evil which must always be presupposed. Plays like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra* contain no such element, and therefore fail to excite in us a reaction of the same kind as that excited by *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*; whereas in *The Merchant of Venice* there is a clear possibility of tragedy in the relations of Shylock and Antonio, which, however, it was no part of Shakespeare's purpose to work out. The vague perception of this condition, without a close analysis of its nature, accounts for the numerous attempts to explain why *Romeo and Juliet* is not precisely a tragedy, or how it would become one if the meaning of the term were slightly and conveniently enlarged. Such attempts have often done much credit to their authors' ingenuity; the only fault to be found with them is that they miss the essential point. At the same time, it would be an equally grave error to suppose that the writer of tragedy seeks aberrations and horrors for their own sake; however relentlessly he may lead us to contemplate crime and atrocity, he does so that he may show us in them a significance. Æschylus does not shrink from revealing Clytaemnestra bedewed with her victim's blood; but what in Seneca and his school would be a mere delight in the shambles is in the Greek only the prelude to a great moral revelation. Just here, I suspect, is the ground for a more rational division between melodrama and tragedy than the familiar formula which would base the difference on the presence or absence of a thoroughgoing causal connection. So far as that formula is not

the product of the over-intellectual approach to the matter already warned against, it derives its validity from the dramatist's success or failure in estimating the moral import of his theme.

The presence of evil is thus the basic factor of the tragic reaction, on which variations ensue according to the attitudes toward this evil which the characters in any particular tragedy adopt. They may enter an evil course with no suspicion of its true nature, like Deianeira with the poisoned robe, or remain unconscious of evil at hand, like Desdemona; but cases like these seldom afford the substance of complete tragedies. More frequently the tragic character seeks either to avoid evil when he should face it, or to turn it to his own ends, thereby bringing into play what Professor Bradley has admirably called "the incalculability of evil—that in meddling with it human beings do they know not what."⁵ Hamlet, deferring his vengeance only to fall amid a welter of slaughter; Iago, finding what is meant for a mere malicious intrigue turn to the undoing of his foes and of himself; Macbeth, thinking to dominate the forces of evil, and in truth made their helpless tool—these are figures in whom, and in whose like, the true power of tragedy becomes fully manifest. Every real tragedy must, with whatever preliminaries, lead to a crisis, in which the potency of evil, and the struggle of the participants as they yield to or defy it, inexorably precipitate a catastrophe.

In a sense the peculiar effect of tragedy will be best preserved when this catastrophe is far-reaching or complete; but to maintain that it is the sole admissible type of ending is to disregard the evidence of actual practice. A catastrophe for at least some of the participants is neces-

⁵ *Shakespearian Tragedy*, p. 386.

sary, if we are to receive a true tragic reaction, not merely interest and excitement; but the whole history of tragedy proves that the quiet close, the destiny worked out by struggle and acceptance, is a legitimate goal of tragic endeavor. It is merely in the power of the writer to decide whether he shall end the action before such a point is reached, or extend it to the inclusion of peace and reconciliation; the nature of the motive, the intent of the writer, the taste of the time, will contribute to the decision of the problem. We see *Œdipus* with blood-stained eye sockets on the threshold of the Theban palace; but we also see him when, purified and made wise by suffering, he passes to his tomb in friendly Attica. If, in other cases, we are left with the catastrophe itself, it is not, in the finest work, with a sense of rebellion and futility, but rather in a state which combines perception of the mystery of things with some degree of resignation. Tragedy, as it faces evil, makes us sympathize with the qualities of those who combat it, even if their struggle proves unavailing; and contact with intensity, however manifested, must to some degree invigorate. Here, and not in any mechanical theory of purgation or poetic justice, is to be found the true function of tragedy, and the true reason for its existence.

II

To show what material is best adapted to tragedy is only half our task; for the history of drama proves conclusively that tragic material is no guarantee of tragic result. That can follow only when the material is contemplated from a particular point of view, under the guidance of a particular faculty; and our next business is to ascertain what that faculty may be. Assuredly the writer of tragedy can dispense neither with the basic sense of fact which gives him

the perception of reality, nor with the constructive reason which orders the facts observed; but these, in themselves, are not enough. The sense of fact is entirely capable of recording the non-significant, whether in actual life or in a written source; in the former case tending toward a narrow realism, or a delight in the mere brutality of crime (as in the Elizabethan murder-play), in the latter toward an accumulation of petty and confusing details. So the reason may be diverted by a fallacy, as in the case of the neo-classic Unities, or led to impose on the material an order superficially logical, but at variance with the deeper truth of experience, as in the inexpedient moralizings of "poetic justice."⁶ Thus the necessity remains that the power which shall supplement or correct these errors of the sense of fact and the reason shall be the imagination.

In a previous paper⁷ I have briefly set forth what I regard as the distinguishing features of the imaginative faculty—its union of concision and amplitude, its ability to deal only with material previously selected and ordered. The first of these is attested whenever a tragedy is beheld or read by a responsive spectator or reader; the effect expands and deepens as it proceeds, as under the influence of evil the characters acquiesce in or resist it, in either case to their undoing, and yet with a development of intensity which is in itself invigorating; so that we are given an intense vision of the deeper aspects of life unperturbed by too much ingenuity of explanation. Even when (as so

⁶ There is also danger that the pleasure of construction will lead to an excessive ingenuity of plotting, and to such over-valuation of that element as we had occasion to note in Aristotle. Only the supreme skill with which Sophocles brings out the essential humanity of his hero saves the *Œdipus Tyrannus* from becoming a mere intricate piece of mechanism.

⁷ *A Definition of the Lyric*, in these *Publications*, XXXIII, esp. pp. 593-5.

often in Elizabethan work) we must make allowance for sub-plots and general intricacy of action, the genuinely tragic portion exhibits a potency which subdues or casts aside the alien and the non-essential;⁸ yet it remains true that the conciser form permits the purer result, as in *Othello* and *Macbeth* contrasted with *Hamlet* and *Lear*. Just how this simplification of the material may be accomplished is a question deserving a somewhat closer analysis; having seen how the substance of tragedy is distinguished in kind, we have now to note how it is constituted in degree.

It is clear from experience that the material best suited to the needs of tragedy will be characterized by a certain remoteness; it is not taken from the writers' immediate surroundings, or at least it does not pretend to reproduce those surroundings with minute fidelity. Most frequently this remoteness is inherent in the material, as in the tragic themes of the Greeks, cleared of encumbering details in the process of transmission, or, to a considerable degree, in those which Shakespeare and his contemporaries drew from British legend, or from a romantic and really non-existent Italy. Sometimes, however, it is secured by the writer's deliberate choice, as when Synge goes for subjects to the distant and primitive Aran islands, or Mæterlinck, in *L'Intruse* and *Intérieur*, regards Flemish life thru a veil which obscures the minutely characteristic, but leaves visible the transformable essentials. But usually it is simpler to accept a theme which has acquired its remoteness in transmission, a fact which explains the retention of certain themes in different periods, and their reinterpretation by a succession of dramatists, because of their demonstrated suitability.

⁸ I have been interested, in re-reading *The Witch of Edmonton*, to note how completely the comic portions drop out of recollection.

Just in proportion as a tragic theme lacks remoteness, just so far it becomes intractable by excess of diverse and accumulated detail. Especially is this true of two sorts of motive—the purely historical, and the domestic. The former, tho it has a connection with the genesis of tragedy and has always been more or less practised, is usually so restricted by its accepted historical facts that freedom of treatment is made impossible; or, in the effort to make the matter more unified, there comes to be excessive reliance on moralizing and poetic justice. This is strikingly exemplified in the historical plays of Jonson and Chapman, which enforce an overt moral doctrine at the expense of flexible response to the variety of experience; ⁹ whereas Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is faithful to essential truth despite the anachronisms which roused Jonson's scorn, and Chapman comes closest to tragedy when, in *Bussy d'Ambois*, he magnifies a contemporary action by viewing it thru an imaginative, even if turbid, haze. To an even greater degree is the domestic drama likely to be over-cumbered with detail, or drawn aside into delineation of social conditions. Such Elizabethan plays as Heywood's *Woman Killed with Kindness* pass into the milder regions of comedy of manners varied by pathos; Ibsen's later social dramas are cramped by the insistence on the details of narrow Norwegian life. The amount of detail assimilable by a tragic imagination will naturally vary to some extent; but it is surely not the part of wisdom to select a theme which is almost certain to resist satisfactory treatment.

This way of regarding the matter puts in its true light

⁹ "Material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs, and limits of an authentional tragedy."—Chapman, Dedication of *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*.

that preference of tragedy for royal or noble heroes which has in its time caused so much needless perplexity. It is only natural that a motive interesting enough to be handed down should concern itself with the men of mark whose deeds were alone thought worth remembering, and who were recalled in their moments of great or striking action, not in those of daily and casual intercourse. We can see how the Renaissance delusion that tragedy concerned itself with royalty, comedy with ordinary folk, grew up; we should see with equal clearness that it was a fallacy based on a false association. Yet it has continued to tinge critical discussions even to the present day. Professor Bradley writes of the Shakespearean hero:

His fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire; and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence—perhaps the caprice—of Fortune or Fate, which no tale of private life can possibly rival.¹⁰

So Professor Butcher opines¹¹ that “the private life of an individual, tragic tho it may be in its inner quality, has never been made the subject of the highest tragedy.” Passing over the use of so ambiguous a term as “private life,”¹² we should certainly distinguish between the legendary kings of Shakespeare and such a narrower court atmosphere, with its excessive emphasis on loyalty to the sovereign, as we find in Beaumont and Fletcher. The former have a rational connection with the determinant condition just discussed, the latter is the product of a

¹⁰ *Shakespearian Tragedy*, p. 10.

¹¹ *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 270

¹² “Il ne s'agit point dans ma tragédie des affaires du dehors. Néron est ici dans son particulier et dans sa famille.”—Racine, *Britannicus*, Première Préface. And surely *Othello* is not much concerned with its hero's public career.

specific state of society at a given time; but the value of either would seem to depend on the particular case, and not to derive from any general principle. I doubt if most persons find the state of Denmark an element in their reception of Hamlet's fall; and still less would the legendary Britain of *Lear* exert any active claim on our sympathies. The case of Scotland in *Macbeth* is indeed more moving; but there again it is a question of emphasis in a particular tragedy, not of a widely applicable rule.

Finally, this conception of tragedy as primarily imaginative explains its almost constant use of verse; that being, as we know, the essentially imaginative medium. There is, indeed, no reason why a prose play should not on occasion be genuinely tragic, except that prose, by its greater capacity for detail, tempts to undue inclusiveness, or to material unsuited to imaginative transformation. Such a play as Ibsen's *Pretenders* proves to excellent effect what the tragic impulse can achieve in prose; but here, as elsewhere, the path of least resistance usually proves the best to follow. Moreover, within the poetic sphere tragedy possesses a kinship with the lyric, historically attested in the case of Greek, and continued, under changed conditions, by the poetic splendor of the Elizabethans, the diffused beauty of diction replacing the specifically lyric element originally supplied by the chorus. Some critics, to be sure, have regarded this connection as inimical to the best interests of tragedy; thus Brunetière writes: "Pour aussi longtemps que le lyrisme persisterait dans la forme tragique, celle-ci ne pouvait atteindre la plénitude, ni par conséquent la perfection de son genre."¹³ None the less, when Greek tragedy had succeeded in expelling the intruder

¹³ *L'Evolution d'un Genre: La Tragédie*, in *Etudes Critiques*, 7me Série (Paris, 1903).

it did not long survive, nor was the vitality of Elizabethan tragedy directly proportionate to the absence of the lyrical element; and Brunetière's notion profanely reminds me of the Irish lad who was so steady that if he'd been any steadier he'd have been dead—a rather high price to pay for steadiness! The evidence of literary history seems rather to show that tragedy must always avail itself of the lyric spirit for its full expansion, and that failure to do so reduces it to barren exercises of logical ingenuity. This conviction has been given definitive form by Pater, in words which, tho familiar, still deserve quotation:

As, historically, the earliest classic drama arose out of the chorus, from which this or that person, this or that episode, detached itself, so, into the unity of a choric song the perfect drama ever tends to return, its intellectual scope deepened, complicated, enlarged, but still with an unmistakable singleness, or identity, in its impression on the mind. Just there, in that vivid single impression left on the mind when all is over, not in any mechanical limitation of time and place, is the secret of the "unities"—the true imaginative unity—of the drama.¹⁴

III

The concept of a reaction secured by the imagination working on material which offers the presence of positive and active evil not only provides us with our desired criterion, but enables us to distinguish two classes into which plays outside the true circle fall when one element or the other is lacking. In one, the imagination is never really brought to bear; either a purely superficial logic gives an apparent continuity to the unrelated, or characters with no real humanity in them are set frigidly debating an alleged moral issue. In the other, we are offered as ends what should be only incidental products; in the effort to secure a reaction at any cost, excesses of crime or of moral

¹⁴ *Shakespeare's English Kings* (in *Appreciations*).

obliquity are made the dominant features, and the emotional tone is exalted beyond sober limits, at the expense of imaginative insight and fidelity to the truth of experience. Plays of the first class have so little vitality that in most cases they are remembered only by the literary historian; but those of the second often have a misleadingly specious resemblance to the intensity of genuine tragedy which they in truth but parody. It may often happen that that intensity may do violence to neo-classic decorum; that the strain to which it subjects the characters may lead them to or beyond the verge of madness, may seek relief in grotesque humor or savage irony, or may be attended by forms and degrees of evil scarcely conceivable to the ordinary mind. Yet it is the mark of a true tragedy that such reactions will seem natural, if not inevitable. The porter in *Macbeth*, the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, the madmen in *Lear*, are no excrescences, no concessions to the groundlings, but the necessary recoil from the tremendous strain under which the characters labor. When, however, these products of a true reaction are presented before any real strain has called them into legitimate existence, we have the crop of absurdities to which unrestrainedly romantic tragedy is always prone.

The perception of this distinction between spurious and real intensity allows us to see various additional facts in their proper perspective. The genuine tragic reaction cannot be secured unless both its creator and its beholders consent to share the strain which those actually involved in such an action must suffer; and since one party or the other may seek to evade this responsibility, it is not strange that thoro-going tragedies should be rare. The writer of tragedy must not only maintain himself at a pitch of imaginative activity which draws heavily on all his

powers,¹⁵ but the inevitable recoil from that tension must be kept congruous with the whole, if lapses into bombast or bathos are to be shunned. There is, as we have noted, considerable liberty in tragedy for the grotesque or the ironic; there is none for the absurd or the flat. The signal triumphs of the imagination are accompanied by the ever-present perils of relapse, to which even the greatest writers are subject; and the pure imagination must always be guided by that constructive intelligence which, as Pater rightly saw, is really one of its forms.

No less weighty is the demand which tragedy imposes on those who behold it; and from this fact also arise obstacles to its full attainment. A given audience may be reluctant to undergo its strain; or, in the desire to abet its evasion, or (it may be) underestimating its powers of endurance, a given dramatist may consciously provide a specious imitation. Doubtless neither public nor playwrights should shoulder the entire responsibility for such refusals; at all events, recognition of "the weakness of the spectators," eager for happy endings and for the attenuation of the tragic severity, is as old as Aristotle. Critics, too, have added to the confusion by their desire for a "poetic justice" strictly distributed according to obvious vice and virtue, or for a tragic effect which shall yet contrive not to shock our moral sensibilities. The stimulus which genuine tragedy offers can be experienced only by submitting ourselves to its requirements; and there is abundant proof, both past and present, that many persons think such submission wearisome or depressing. Tragedy, like other noble arts, is among the fair things that are hard.

¹⁵ A striking account of what this strain means to a writer may be found in Mr. Joseph Conrad's *A Personal Record*, pp. 166-173 (Deep Sea Edition).

If to the difficulty of sustaining the imaginative effort we add the tendency of tragic material to disintegrate, the rarity of tragedy will no longer be found surprising. It is always hard to keep a complex substance under control, always easier to follow the line of least resistance which leads to the emphasis of one aspect at the expense of the other. If, for convenience, we speak of the Aristotelian combination of "pity and terror," we see how readily pity passes into sentimentality, or even moral delinquency, how readily terror passes into the sensational; and both divergences may appear in the same period, or even in the same dramatist. Both are visible as early as Euripides, tho the latter is somewhat kept under by native good taste; they recur in the Senecan blend of impossible exaltation and bald horror; they are close at hand when Shakespearean tragedy is succeeded by the romantic tragi-comedy of Beaumont and Fletcher and by the uneasy moral temerity of Ford brooding over themes of incest. Or, if we look at the matter from another angle, we see that narrow realism leads to such departures as the inept restatement of legend in contemporary terms, as often in Euripides; to mere delineation of manners, as in the English chronicle-play after it had forsaken the direction of tragedy; or to sheer delight in brute horror. Correspondingly, unchecked romanticism perishes in falsely exaggerated sentiment, or, at worst, in sheer absurdity. All these aberrations indicate either a refusal to face and work out a theme fraught with evil, or an effort to excite tragic emotions by offering us in advance what ought only to be products of a true reaction; and in every such case, tho the external aspects of tragedy may be simulated, its essence is hopelessly lost.

In brief, then, our conception of tragedy regards it as originating in ignorance or underestimating of the power

of evil, the consequence of such a flaw in character being the downfall of at least some of those concerned. It is clear that such a conception can be realized outside the dramatic field; that, even tho tragedy has originated in that field, it is by no means confined to it, but may exist, under appropriate conditions, in the novel. These conditions would include the simplifying of characters and events, the subordination of the purely narrative element, the rendering of all in an intense and imaginative style; and to attain them in a form which offers no such external restraints as those afforded by stage presentation, and which, by its use of prose, is enabled to absorb detail indefinitely, will demand constant selection and vigorous suppression. We need therefore not be surprised if the tragic novel proves as rare as the genuine stage tragedy; yet that it can be attained is proved by such an example as Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. Moreover, the scope of the novel, able as it is to deal with quantities and varieties of material exceeding the capacity of the dramatic form, may make attainable a truly realistic tragedy of contemporary life—one which, avoiding the pitfalls of the narrowly "realistic" novel, with its dependence on documents and its quasi-reasoning procedure, will yet subordinate other faculties and aspects to an imaginative purpose. Thus might arise a product new by virtue of its direct treatment of actuality, and yet within the bounds of tragedy as here defined.

Thus, if our conception of tragedy as primarily imaginative leads us to restrict our recognition of examples in the dramatic field, we have as compensations a really definite content for the term, based on criteria of material and faculty, and also a perception of its existence in other fields than the purely dramatic. We need not be dissatisfied

with a result which accounts for various traditional features of dramatic tragedy otherwise hard to explain, and which shows us how works utterly unlike in outward form are united in a profound similarity of moral penetration and imaginative vision.

CHARLES E. WHITMORE.